



Sunshine home: The Palm Beach house of the Duchess of York's host Robert Fomon, 66

Fergie and her playboy host

AS THE Duchess of York settled in to her Florida trip today, her host, Robert Fomon, was revealed as a notorious playboy.

The 66-year-old ex-financier, who married third wife Lewis Widener two years ago at his Palm Beach home, admits he has always had an eye for "pretty young girls".

One of his former senior staff said, "He likes nothing

from Jim Gallagher
in New York

better than being in a jet at 30,000 feet with talented young women. He considered it the spoils of war."

Another said: "One of the roles I played was to keep him out of trouble."

"And I would say that I was consistently successful." The Duchess flew to

Florida last night with her father, Major Ronald Ferguson. Her trip will include watching her father captain the British polo team at a match sponsored by Cartier in aid of the Motor Neurone Disease Association.

Mr Fomon has boasted in the past of bedding a number of his female staff and even put girlfriends on the payroll.

Many financial experts

blamed him for the collapse of the EF Hutton Investment Bank which he headed for 17 years. He was ousted as chairman in 1988 shortly before the company collapsed and was sold to the American Express Shearson Lehman empire.

He was criticised in financial circles for drinking too much, chasing women and for his "work hard, play

Continued on Page 3 Col 1

□ WEEKEND 25 □ ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE 47-53 □ LETTERS 55 □ PATRIC WALKER 56

2060374602

from Nigel Rosser in Palm Beach

THEY EVEN perfume the sewers here in Palm Beach. Gallons of lilac, vanilla and cherry scent have been sprayed down manholes to ensure unpleasant smells never intrude on the fantasy world which hard cash has carved out of a former mangrove swamp.

The all-pervasive smell of money is everywhere in this affluent seaside town, currently welcoming the Duchess of York after a tough week in the London spotlight.

And to the party set here, the Duchess's arrival is the best thing that could have happened. She is, said one, "the perfect ornament to the party circuit".

Only hours after her 9½-hour flight from London, the Duchess launched herself enthusiastically into a round of society events at a cocktail party, putting behind her a week of speculation about her friendship with Texan millionaire Steve Wyatt.

Her flight over here has been paid by Town and Country magazine, which is jointly sponsoring with jewellers Cartier a weekend polo match, at which Fergie and her father Major Ronald Ferguson will be present.

Last night the Duchess played the role of party host to perfection as she drifted gaily from guest to guest, wearing a short black skirt and bottle-green double-



"She's only been there a day!"

breasted jacket.

For her efforts, she will take away £15,000 for the British Motor Neurone Association, of which she is patron. Royalty, it seems, is worth its weight in gold in this part of the world.

Earlier, the New York-based Town and Country magazine also hosted a waterfront party on Ocean Boulevard for the Duchess.

According to one eyewitness: "What Town and Country's part of the bargain amounts to is not certain but undoubtedly exclusive rights to certain events attended by the Duchess this weekend are not out of

the question." As British Embassy official Mike Price said: "It is a sponsored trip, of course. But the other side of the coin is that she is going to undertake a couple of appearances for a couple of worthy organisations and at the end of the day at no expense to the British taxpayer, the British Motor Neurone Association is going to get a pretty substantial figure of £15,000 for free."

It is not the first time a member of the Royal Family has accepted Florida's generous hospitality.

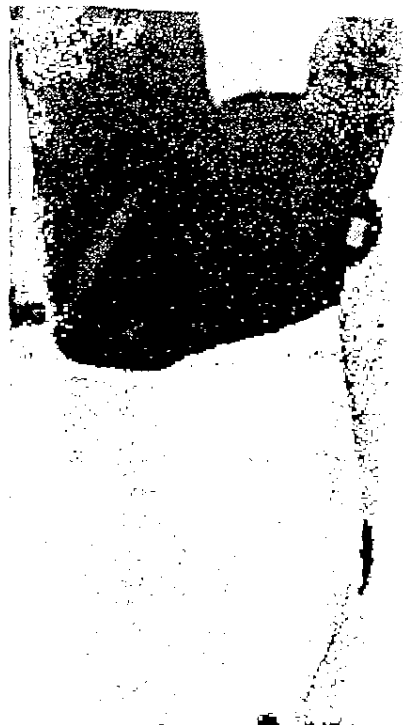
In 1939 the Prince of Wales appeared in charity polo matches at the same polo club, the Palm Beach Polo and Country Club, that Fergie will grace on Sunday.

Critics of Fergie here say she should have declined certain parts of her itinerary, in particular a dinner at the Everglades Club — where the Duke of Windsor used to stay during the Second World War — in honour of the William Holden World Wildlife Foundation.

The club is so exclusive it seems there are no black or Jewish members, nor are there likely to be any in the near future.

The British Embassy in Washington has been inundated with calls by Jewish activists to denounce the dinner.

On Saturday, the Duchess will tour a nursery for an hour-long meeting with people suffering Lou Gehrig's Disease at the Community Foundation of Palm Beach



The Duchess brushes hair from

and Martin Counties in West Palm Beach.

This is followed by a tour of a children's medical centre at St Mary's Hospital before a private luncheon and dinner at the Everglades.

But the big event, the celebrity polo match, will come on Sunday.

After presenting trophies, the Duchess will fly back to London on Sunday night.

Playboy playing host to a duchess

Continued from Page 1

hard" lifestyle. Although the firm lost £50 million one year it still spent £18 million sending its leading brokers and their wives on all expense-paid trips.

Two corporate jets sat in New York ready to fly off to Hutton apartments in Paris, London and San Francisco.

But Mr Fomon's biggest public gaffe came in August 1986 when he appeared in a men's fashion magazine with his arms round two young blondes proudly claiming: "I'm old enough to be grandfather to some of the girls I take out."

"They're decorative, nice to look at and they have keen senses of humour." Many Hutton executives thought his antics embarrassed the company and he was criticised for bad public relations. But Mr Fomon's response was: "I don't understand why people get upset. I can't help it if I appear in the papers with young girls."

In 1983 he fractured his leg in three places "getting undressed for bed".



The Society set: Steve Wyatt, right, with his mother Lynn and brother Douglas

2060374603